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HEADLINE: Where were you when they shot JFK again? Dallas relives its darkest moments: the day that saw a President killed

BYLINE: by John Hiscock in Dallas

BODY:

IT HAS taken nearly 30 years, a television soap opera and a national political convention for Dallas to erase its image as the "City of Hate" . . . the city that killed President John F. Kennedy.

But the old wounds are being reopened as the events of November 22, 1963, unfold again for the film cameras. The presidential motorcade, the grassy knoll, the "sniper's window" in what was the Texas School Book Depository and the old Press Alt-H for Help or Alt-Q to Quit.

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jail where Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald are again uppermost in the city's consciousness, sparking heated debates on the propriety of re-enacting the city's darkest hours.

Oscar-winning film director Oliver Stone has been given the city's full co-operation in filming J.F.K., which stars another Oscar winner, Kevin Costner, as Jim Garrison, the crusading New Orleans district attorney who tried to prove the Kennedy murder was a conspiracy and wrote two books on the subject.

While the film crew's month-long stay is expected to pour millions of dollars into the city's coffers, not everyone welcomes Stone's foray into the past. With the assassination, Dallas gained a reputation for social intolerance, based in part on the much-discussed but never proved notion that the activities of wealthy Right-wing extremists in the city created an atmosphere of hatred that helped to motivate Oswald. Another theory had it that Oswald was hired by a group of Dallas billionaires.

It took three votes and much debate before the county commissioners gave Stone permission to film at the sixth-floor window of the depository from which the shots that killed Kennedy were fired. The area is now part of a museum, The Sixth Floor, which opened in 1989 after years of controversy. The museum board voted 5-4 to let Stone use the window.

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According to Miss V'Ann Guiffre, the museum's director of public relations, the close vote reflects the division between old and new residents over the assassination's effect on the city. "Those who lived here at the time are still trying to cope with the assassination. They had a hard time because people

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absolutely hated them because they were from where Kennedy was killed.

"Other people - mainly those who moved here after the assassination - feel the film is a positive thing because it means Dallas can now face up to and deal with what happened objectively."

Stone, who also filmed Talk Radio and Born on the Fourth of July in the city, admits he has encountered some opposition, but he says it comes only from "a very determined and vocal old guard". He stresses that his film does not "point the finger" at Dallas. "We will offer a number of theories and let the audience decide. We're looking at the old evidence and will present alternative scenarios, not only based on Jim Garrison's book but on information that came to light in the Seventies and Eighties."

The film co-stars British actor Gary Oldman as Lee Harvey Oswald and Sissy Spacek as his wife. Local actors have been cast in the cameo roles of President Kennedy, Jacqueline Kennedy, Texas Governor John Connally and Abraham Zapruder, the onlooker who captured the assassination on film.
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In an ironic touch, Garrison himself, now an appeal court judge, will appear as US Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, whose Commission Report declared Oswald the lone assassin. The film's screenplay is based on Garrison's book, On the Trail of the Assassins, and research culled from citizens and eyewitnesses. Stone says J.F.K. will illustrate additional information that has surfaced since Garrison's revelations.

Immediately after Oswald's arrest, Garrison launched an investigation into the assassination and arrested a CIA pilot and mercenary, David Ferrie, whom he turned over to the FBI. Shortly afterwards Ferrie was released, and less than a year later the Warren Commission Report ratified the official story that Oswald had acted alone.

Three years later Garrison revived his investigation. He uncovered evidence ignored by the commission that members of the US intelligence community had conspired to kill Kennedy. But his investigation was discredited by the federal government.

Stone said he was driven to mount the project because "John Kennedy was the godfather of my generation and a lot of us believe he was murdered for political reasons". He would take some "creative liberties" in the story for the sake of entertainment value and pacing, but he conceded: "I can't take too
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many because the material is very important and sacred to the public."

To the citizens of Dallas - about 1,500 of whom have signed on as extras - the downtown area has the look of a town locked in a time warp. Cars from the late Fifties and early Sixties fill the streets and women in beehive hairdos throng the pavements.

"It's real eerie," said Mrs Judy Miller, who found herself caught up in a rehearsal of the motorcade scene. "I had a feeling of deja vu seeing the President standing in the back of the car with Jackie in a pill-box hat beside him."

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The Dallas Film Commission, whose job it is to attract film crews to the city, has no qualms. "Of course it is re-opening old wounds, but we have to realise that this is an important part of history," said Roger Burke, the commission's executive director. "Older people feel that perhaps Dallas is doing this out of guilt; but in fact we are doing it purely as a business proposition. Oliver Stone has been very good to us - this is the third movie he has made here - and we are being good to him, too.

"I can't think of any other city that would close off 16 blocks and divert 21,000 commuters from the downtown area for 2 1/2 weeks. The fact is that this Press Alt-H for Help or Alt-Q to Quit.

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film could not be made anywhere else."

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